

Soldiers Online

On Duty in the NET



HERLANDS

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer



THE U.S. Army maintains fewer than 2,000 soldiers in the Netherlands. But there's nothing small about Dutch regard for the U.S. force.

In the province of Limburg, the tri-border region where Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands meet, the Dutch people especially love Americans. "It was the Americans — and only the Americans — who liberated Limburg from the Germans during World War II," said Rita Hoefnagels, a spokeswoman for the Schinnen-based 254th Base Support Battalion, the only remaining U.S. military support base in the Netherlands.

The people of Limburg show their appreciation several times each year, she said, by hosting special military-related events, including annual Liberation Day celebrations; Memorial Day services at Margraten U.S. Military Cemetery; and Christmas Eve services inside a Maastricht cave honoring soldiers who fought in the Battle of the Bulge.

Recently, in Eygelshoven — home to Headquarters, Combat Equipment Group-North — the local community honored two 30th Infantry Division veterans who helped liberate South Limburg in September 1944 *[look for a related article in an upcoming issue]*.

The Dutch affection for Americans is evident, too, at a small village outside Rotterdam, where the people wholeheartedly welcome a 598th Transportation Group soldier and his family who live among them in a tiny marina, aboard a 37-foot sailboat *[see this month's Focus on People]*.

And in the northeastern corner of the country, eight U.S. soldiers assigned to the Army's Combat Equipment Base-Vriezenveen live with their families among their Dutch hosts, and some of their children attend an international school housed in an 18th-century castle *[see related story]*.

In a land renowned for its canals, windmills

SFC Ron Lewis, a quality-assurance inspector at Combat Equipment Base-Vriezenveen, visits the community's 19th-century windmill with his wife, Nikki, and their son, Samuel.

and wooden shoes, there's much more than meets the eye. Soldiers who have the opportunity to live and work in Holland say duty here is like a reward for other, tougher tours.

In Schinnen, about 30 minutes from Maastricht, Ziek Kaserne lies nestled at the end of a quiet country road.

The only route to the tiny Army installation runs parallel to the railroad tracks that transport passengers to and from the nearest civilian station, Heerlen.

Ask residents where the 254th BSB is located, and they'll be able to tell you. Many still refer to the site as the Old Emma Mine complex.

The kaserne was the site of Shaft 4, a mineshaft that ran 6.5 kilometers from Schinnen to the Emma Mine in Hoensbroek. Its construction lasted 10 years, from 1946 to 1956. Coal production ceased in 1965, after only four years, when Dutch engineers discovered large quantities of natural gas. More than 45,000 workers and families were affected when the Limburg-area mines closed, said Hoefnagels.

Then, in 1967 — after France withdrew from NATO and asked Allied Forces, Central Europe, to leave — the former AFCENT relocated to the Limburg area, as did its support element.

In 1969, the AFCENT Support



The fabled tulips of Holland are among the delightful sights enjoyed by soldiers and family members fortunate enough to live and work in the Netherlands.

Activity relocated again, this time from Heerlen to the Shaft 4 site, where it's been ever since.

Today, the 254th BSB provides quality-of-life support to U.S. military personnel, Defense Department civilians and their families.

That support is extended to some 6,500 people in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, northwestern Germany and a small portion of Belgium, said battalion operations officer MAJ Lawrence Jones.

It's a big job for the BSB's 265 employees — among them fewer than 50 soldiers, half of whom are MPs, Jones said.

The 254th operates facilities in Schinnen that include a new vehicle

processing center, post exchange, commissary, shoppette, outdoor-recreation center, fitness center, bowling center, Army post office and adventure center.

The latter offers soldiers and families opportunities to play sports, plan leisure tours and participate in sponsored trips to Europe's tourist destinations, said adventure center manager Rob Kent.

The BSB is also responsible for services and facilities in nearby Treebeek, and at the Regional Headquarters of Allied Forces North, in Brunssum.

No on-post, U.S. government housing is available in the Netherlands, so the 254th BSB's Directorate of Public Works manages leased quarters, overseeing a wide range of contracts and a large amount of real property, said MSG David Sobczak, DPW NCOIC.

As liaison between property owners and renters, Sobczak attends to everything from noise complaints to rental agreement negotiations in four countries.

Besides caring for its own, the 254th BSB provides logistical support for units passing through the region during contingency operations. The battalion's MPs provide security at marshaling areas, sea- and airports, and at support centers.

"When a unit moves to Kosovo, for

U.S. Army Units, Netherlands

TODAY, the U.S. Army presence in the Netherlands includes soldiers assigned to the 254th BSB; Regional Headquarters, Allied Forces, North Europe (formerly Allied Forces, Central Europe), in Brunssum; HQs., Combat Equipment Group-Europe, in Eygelshoven, with two of its subordinate combat equipment bases in Europe, one at Brunssum, the other in Vriezenveen; Allied Command, Europe, Communications-Information Systems Contingency Assets Battalion, in Maastricht; and the U.S. Military Traffic Management Command's 598th Transportation Group in Rotterdam. — *Heike Hasenauer*



Among the 50 soldiers assigned to the 254th BSB in Schinnen is SSG James Milner, seen here checking MP reports.

Equipment on Call

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer

Brunssum

AT Combat Equipment Base-Brunssum, seven soldiers among a work force of 250 Dutch nationals ensure that equipment that may be needed by soldiers in the field remains in top-notch condition for shipment anywhere in the world at a moment's notice.

The unit recently tested its speed and proficiency at "loading, locking and arranging transportation for shipment of equipment," said SFC Jefferson Davis, an automotive quality-assurance inspector.

That exercise is critical, given CEB-BR's mission to receive, fix, store and configure Army materiel and get it to the soldiers who need it in a timely fashion, said property book officer CW2 Rodney Sims.

The stocks are stored in 20 humidity-controlled warehouses on 124 acres of land, Sims said. Together, the structures provide 1 million square feet of space and house everything from tool kits to heavy equipment. Among more than 500 line items stored and maintained at the site are a variety of small arms, M88A1 recovery vehicles, Humvees and 2.5- and 5-ton trucks.

"This is a contract operation," with

example, our MPs pull guard on their equipment while other BSB soldiers and civilians contract for meals and rooms," said 254th BSB CSM Everett Mason.

"We have the least number of people covering the largest land mass in all of U.S. Army, Europe," said CPT Julie Spires, the 254th BSB provost marshal.

MPs in the Netherlands deal directly with the Dutch local police and the Dutch military police, the *Koninklijke Marechaussee*, she added.

"Under the Status of Forces



SFC Jefferson Davis, a CEB-BR automotive quality-assurance inspector, checks an M577 command vehicle to ensure it's ready for the field. The facility's seven soldiers and 250 Dutch nationals keep the equipment in top condition.

Dutch Ministry of Defense civilians who are similar to wage-grade employees in the states, said Sims. "The soldiers who work here are quality-assurance personnel."

Armament maintenance supervisor SFC Eric Massie gives the final OK that the small arms and fire-control systems repaired by CEB-BR's Dutch technicians are up to standard.

"We represent the Army standard to the Dutch, who actually perform what's called 'direct support-general support maintenance,' that is, repairing and replacing parts," Davis said.

The facility has 28 maintenance bays with painting and derusting capabilities, and an on-site metallurgy shop to produce many small parts no longer in the Army inventory.

Agreement, we don't have any exclusive jurisdiction until the *Marechaussee* releases it to us," she said. "We're here more as liaisons to the host nation and as community security for the U.S. contingent."

Another MP concern is that drugs like marijuana, although not legal, are easily available in the Netherlands, said Spires.

SSG Andrew Dawn has been in the Netherlands for about a year. Earlier, he was assigned to a field artillery unit in Baumholder, Germany.

"Here, I'm dealing with more

paperwork than I've ever seen," said Dawn. "I'm much more relaxed, physically. But there are more mental challenges."

Dawn's wife, SPC Anitra Dawn, is a wire systems installer with the Allied Command, Europe, Communications-Information Systems Contingency Assets Bn. in Maastricht.

The couple and their three children live in Landgraaf, equal distance from their separate job locations — about a 25-minute drive for each. The two youngest children attend Dutch daycare, and their 7-year-old attends



Davis inspects a two-and-a-half-ton truck being worked on in one of CEB-BR's 28 maintenance bays. Each has painting and derusting capabilities, and an on-site metallurgy shop can produce many small parts no longer in the Army inventory.

Mechanics service about 40 vehicles a day, doing everything from minor adjustments to engine replacements, Davis said. Upon completion, each vehicle undergoes roughly an hour-long QA inspection.

"The Dutch exhibit an excellent work ethic," said COL Tom Palmer,

commander of Headquarters, Army Materiel Command Combat Equipment Group-Europe. "They understand the importance of where the equipment is going, and they know that our soldiers will depend on it."

Before it leaves the site, equipment undergoes three to four inspections.

The soldier who performs the final maintenance-supply check signs off on the vehicle.

"We're the last line of defense between that vehicle and the soldiers in Kosovo who will depend on it," said materiel management NCO SFC Taylor Njagu. "So we take our work very seriously."

"Most of the equipment we receive comes from units in Europe that were inactivated, and from units rotating into and out of the Balkans," Sims said.

"We've recently experienced a surge to meet requirements in Kosovo," added MAJ Chuck Hyde, CEB-BR commander. "We had to subcontract with a firm in England to get 45 more mechanics."

Besides refurbishing incoming

the AFNORTH International School.

Soldiers go to the NATO base at Geilenkirchen, Germany, for medical and dental care, and patients needing hospitalization or surgery may go to the Air Force hospital in Bitburg, or the Army hospital in Landstuhl, both in Germany.

While the lack of a typical military installation poses some inconveniences, being part of a small organization has advantages, Jones said.

Single staff sergeants and below, as an example, live in single-soldier quarters that far exceed the Army's one-plus-one standards for barracks. The accommodations are more like modern condos, Jones said.

SSG Anna Pascucelli, an AFNORTH records clerk, described hers as "a beautiful, apartment-like home, with living room, kitchen, bedroom and balcony." Each apartment has a stove, refrigerator, washer and dryer, and each building has a fitness center.

Families also rave about their "beautiful homes in the community,"

even though they must often spend 60 days in a hotel awaiting available housing, Jones said.

When AFCENT became AFNORTH in March 2000 more personnel from the other services came aboard, and more housing has been needed, he added. "We're building 34 new homes to remedy the situation."

SSG Michael Alexander, senior communications-security specialist-radio repairman at the ACCAP Bn., said his government-leased home in Neerbeek "is by far the nicest housing I've had in my 12 years in the Army."

It's constructed in the standard European fashion — of solid brick,



Veronique Alexander prepares coffee in the kitchen of the government-leased home in Neerbeek she shares with her husband, SSG Michael Alexander, and their children.

concrete and tile throughout — and is separated from the others by neat hedges.

In May, Alexander prepared for his second deployment to Kosovo, but he wasn't apprehensive about leaving his family for three months.

"Veronique can take care of herself," Alexander said. "She's assimilated herself into the Dutch community and knows she can count on neighbors and friends if she needs help." The couple's three children, among them a 7-year-old son

with audio-graphic dyslexia, attend the AFNORTH International School.

"It's great," said Veronique. "The school offers so many programs to help him learn. Because of its special education program, he's fluent in

equipment, the CEB-BR ships needed equipment to units throughout the world. Since the beginning of the Army's deployment to Kosovo, the unit has shipped more than 12,000 items, Sims said.

The soldiers typically contract for commercial trucking companies to move materiel to the port of embarkation. Several soldiers also travel to the ports to provide last-minute fixes that may be necessary.

CEB-BR personnel also supply equipment for the Army's Prepositioned Equipment Afloat program, store and maintain two 10,000-man chemical defense equipment sets to send at a moment's notice to soldiers in Bosnia and Kosovo, and maintain a 53,000-man set for potential use by other U.S. Army, Europe,

soldiers, Sims said.

Davis said that for soldiers at CEB-BR, days typically begin at 6:30 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. The exception is when equipment is shipped. "We work longer hours then, because delays could cost a shipping company — and therefore the Army — hundreds of thousands of dollars in port costs. In the last 15 months, we've put in longer hours about every three months."

The two combat equipment bases in the Netherlands are part of AMC CEG-Europe, which is responsible for \$1.7 billion worth of equipment Europe-wide, said Chuck Fick, a

Materiel-management NCO SFC Taylor Njagu checks the dates on items stored in one of CEB-BR's 20 humidity-controlled warehouses. "Expired" items are serviced or replaced.



German and English."

Fifteen minutes from Schinnen, 254th BSB 1SG Andrew Chesser, his wife, Christi, and their 2-year-old son, Austin, live in government-leased housing in Amstenrade. Austin attends the AFNORTH Child Development Center, 10 minutes away. Christi, who works in the Schinnen mailroom, gave birth to the couple's second child at the hospital in Heerlen in July.

"Living in Holland is quaint, quiet and beautiful," she said. "There are so many opportunities for families here."

Combat Equipment Base-Brunssum materiel management NCO SFC Taylor Njagu has enjoyed his tour in the Netherlands because of the area's proximity to the rest of Europe.

"We're two hours from Amsterdam, one and a half from Brussels, three from Frankfurt, six from Paris, and eight from Normandy — all rich in history," Njagu said.

Hoefnagels said that soldiers

who extend their tours in the Netherlands often do so because "there's a hometown atmosphere here. Most of the Dutch nationals were raised honoring Americans. And because this is the only country where people speak Dutch, the Dutch have been forced to learn English, so there's no language barrier."

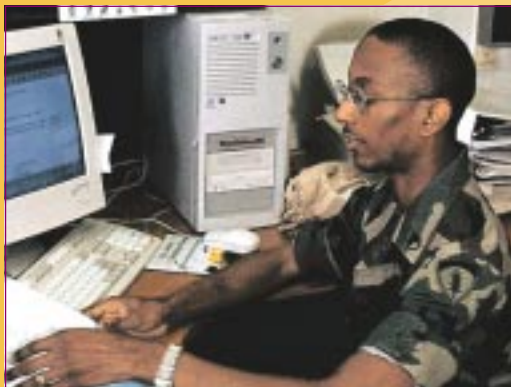
Soldiers are also impressed by the

international schools their children attend, and the fact that their own opportunities for learning are great, she said.

"Educational opportunities are a major benefit of an assignment here," said SSG Darrell Arndt, a military customs inspector at CEB-BR who ensures that prepositioned equipment meets U.S. Department of Agriculture requirements before it's returned to the United States.

"At Fort Drum, I completed only one course in two years. Now, I'm well on my way to completing a bachelor's degree," said Arndt. Additionally, "I get to work with the Dutch and have learned a lot from them."

"I participate in a lot of volksmarches," said SGT Colin Clayton, another MP from the 254th BSB. "Over the past three years, I've participated in the Kennedy March, completing 50 miles a day in Sittard, near Schinnen, and in 1999 completed the Nijmegen March. And how many soldiers get to place a wreath at GEN Patton's grave? I did that, too." □



SSG Andrew Dawn, 254th BSB administrative specialist, handles a wide variety of paperwork — far more in Schinnen, he said, than he ever did in a line unit.

spokesman for AMC CEG-E's headquarters in the nearby town of Eygelshoven.

Collectively, the AMC CEG-E sites throughout Europe recently shipped more than 10,000 pieces of equipment — from toolboxes to tanks — to Bosnia and Kosovo, he said.

Since 1992 AMC CEG-E has sent more than 50,000 pieces of equipment to stock prepositioned ships and more than 40,000 pieces of equipment to the Balkans. "And a large portion of the equipment currently prepositioned in South Korea and Southwest Asia came directly from AMC CEG-E stocks," Fick said.

"We're a product of the old REFORGER [Return of Forces to Germany] days, when units arriving in Europe from the states needed thou-

sands of tanks and Bradleys," Massie said.

"The old strategy was to have 10 divisions in Europe in 10 days. And the former POMCUS (Prepositioned Materiel Configured to Unit Sets) accommodated that," said Palmer.

Today, the only heavy armor prepositioned in the Netherlands — one combat brigade worth — is located in northeastern Holland, in the small village of Vriezenveen.

One of three sets of equipment to outfit heavy combat brigades in Europe, it's maintained by soldiers and host-nation employees from CEB-Vriezenveen [see related story].

"There's been a discussion about the relevance of Army war-reserve stocks in Europe since the end of the Cold War," said Palmer.

"In 1991, beginning with operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, we certainly demonstrated a relevance," he said. He estimated the U.S. government has saved millions of dollars on the shipment of equipment to Bosnia and Kosovo, and the costs of soldiers having to fly in and "fall in on" their equipment and drive it away.

Vriezenveen

TO say that Combat Equipment Base-Vriezenveen is off the beaten path is an understatement. "We are genuinely an outpost," said MAJ Andre Nettles, commander of the unit that includes only eight soldiers among a work force of more than 250 Dutch Defense Ministry employees. "There's no PX, no commissary. We live on the Dutch economy 100 percent. The closest Army support is almost four hours away at Schinnen."

In an area considered remote — because of its distance from U.S. support facilities — soldiers receive aid in locating housing through the



The American, Dutch and NATO flags fly at the entrance to the Combat Equipment Base-Vriezenveen — a "remote" site some four hours by car from the 254th BSB in Schinnen.

Schinnen-based 254th Base Support Battalion. The 254th also provides furniture and appliances for their homes.

"We get a \$700 move-in housing allowance," said quality-assurance NCOIC MSG Kenneth Krebs. "It pays for things like wallpaper, carpeting and light fixtures, because when the Dutch leave, they take everything with them."

In Vriezenveen, the Army offers few services on the installation — only a very small MWR facility and a modest library.

"We do most of our shopping on the economy," Krebs said. "But we're issued full-size deep freezers, so we buy most of our meat once a month at the commissary in Schinnen."

A warrant officer who recently arrived in Vriezenveen gives haircuts to anyone who trusts him to do so.

The closest connection to home is the daily mail delivery, and two videocassettes arrive weekly to be shared among Army families. Additionally, a newly begun Head Start



A 19th-century windmill near the village of Vriezenveen typifies the area's laid-back, historic charm. Eight U.S. soldiers and more than 250 Dutch nationals work at the nearby combat equipment base.



program provides an introduction to the Dutch language and culture.

Once a week, a housing office representative arrives to help with household-related bills. For medical emergencies, families go to the Dutch hospital downtown, or to Hanau, Germany, a 4.5-hour drive away.

Once a month, Kreb travels the 275 miles to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers, Europe, dental clinic at Chievres, Belgium, where his daughter has her braces adjusted.

There are no Department of Defense Dependent Schools in this area of vast fields and farms, so soldiers in Vriezenveen can elect to send their children to a DODDs school in England or make other arrangements.

Nettles' three children are home-schooled. Other dependent children attend the oldest international school in the Netherlands, the International School Eerde. An 18th-century castle that dates to 1715, surrounded by a

moat, it was first used as a school in 1934.

Kreb's three children attend the International School in Groningen, Netherlands.

He and other U.S. employees and families living in Coevorden — about an

hour's drive from Vriezenveen — chose to commute to their new jobs when the former Combat Equipment Battalion-Northwest there closed a year ago. The Groningen school is some 50 miles from Coevorden.

"There are seven children in my daughter's class from seven different countries, including Russia, China and Pakistan. All are taught in English," said Kreb, who doesn't worry about transporting them. "A personal, Mercedes taxi picks them up at the door every morning and returns them every afternoon."

SFC Ron Lewis, a quality-assurance inspector at CEB-VR, said his 3-year-old son, Samuel, attends a Montessori school. Renowned as a

Vriezenveen has only a very small MWR facility and a modest library.

comprehensive teaching institution for youngsters, the schools are typically expensive, said Lewis. "It's inexpensive here — 70 Guilders per month, about \$30. Stateside, the monthly cost is nearly \$400." Another benefit here is the 1-to-3 teacher-to-pupil ratio.

Lewis' wife, Nikki, a German national whom he met while stationed in Mannheim, Germany, said: "We're out here alone, basically. A married soldier, without his family, moved in recently, a few houses down from us. But we're it as far as U.S. military goes."

Nikki said the soldiers' wives try to get together periodically, but most live in various areas, 45 minutes to an hour away. So, she and her family have gotten to know their Dutch neighbors very well.

"Anna, from next door, tells us about Dutch events and holidays," said Nikki. "It's nice to learn from each other," Anna said. "We're always there for each other. We don't just say 'Hi' and leave it at that. We visit, barbecue



The children of some Vriezenveen-based soldiers attend the International School Eerde — a former castle — in Ommen. Here a student sketches in a classroom that was once the castle's orangerie.

together, have a few drinks.”

During their leisure time, soldiers and families visit Amsterdam, 1.5 hours away, or Six Flags amusement park, a one-hour drive from Vriezenveen.

The Americans often travel into Germany, where there’s always something new and exciting to do, Krebs said.

At the base, soldiers not only work among more than 250 host-nation employees and oversee what they do, they work at the only site in the Netherlands where heavy armored vehicles are stored and maintained. The materiel, one armor brigade set, includes Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and humvees, said Fick.

Last summer, personnel from the United States and Germany augmented the regular work force to meet the demands of operations in Kosovo, said Nettles.

In 1999 CEB-VR moved nearly 4,500 items to the Balkans, 11,000 items to prepositioned ships and about 4,000 items to Southwest Asia, he said.

The base itself boasts 16 humidity-controlled warehouses, which provide 1.5 million square feet of storage space. Twenty-four maintenance bays facilitate equipment repair. And an on-site fabrication shop allows employees to do everything from cut and sew seat fabrics to fashion metal parts and build wooden shipping crates. Last year workers completed 6,000 items over a four-month period, Nettles said.

“I have 20 years in the Army. This is the best it could be. You do a lot of work, but you’re away from headquarters,” Krebs said. “Besides that, we know we’re giving the soldiers the best equipment.”

“I was a platoon sergeant and pulled two tours at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif.,” added Lewis. “I enjoyed being around so many other soldiers and being out in the field environment. But, every now and then, an assignment like this is really nice. I’ve been here a year, and I say from the bottom of my heart, I don’t want to leave.” □

MTMC Nethe Supplying the

Story by Heike Hasenauer Photos by Bram de Jong

U.S. Army Military Traffic Management Command soldiers have been stationed in the Dutch port city of Rotterdam for more than 30 years.

Veteran soldiers and longtime civilian employees of the current 598th Transportation Group’s predecessor, the BENELUX Terminal, remember the frantic days of REFORGERS [Return of Forces to Germany], when ships delivered tons of supplies and thousands of tanks, helicopters and other vehicles destined for hordes of troops arriving in Europe from the United States.

Today, demands on the Rotterdam-based unit may be less

frantic, said 598th Trans. Grp. spokesman Bram de Jong, who was himself heavily involved in MTMC business during the height of the Cold War. There are no such major exercises that call for massive movement of materiel at once. But today, numerous contingencies throughout Europe keep the unit on its toes.

There are many unit movements — deployments and redeployments — outsiders don’t readily see, said COL Tom Thompson, the 598th Trans. Grp. commander during **Soldiers’** visit. Additionally, the group moves supplies to the 100,000 troops assigned throughout Europe, keeping troop dining facilities, commissaries and post exchanges stocked.

“Part of our mission is to provide



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timely, responsive surface port handling for the KFOR units moving out of Kosovo by rail to Bremerhaven for onward movement by ship,” Thompson said. “We handle tracked and wheeled vehicles, munitions and hazardous cargo. And that presents a lot of challenges.”

The 598th is headquarters for the battalions that conduct port operations throughout Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia — among them the 838th Trans. Bn. in Rotterdam and the 839th Trans. Bn. in Livorno, Italy, said operations officer CPT Bleu Hilburn.

Colocated with the headquarters are the 838th Trans. Bn. and the 39th Trans. Bn. Movement Control Team, an element of the 1st Trans. Movement Control Agency, which is responsible

for inland movements to and from ports by military or commercial means; and Military Sealift Command Office, Northern Europe, which coordinates ship movements for deploying and redeploying units.

The latter ensures that ships meet requirements for holding capacity, distance and speed, Thompson said.

Representatives from the Coast Guard, who travel throughout Europe, Africa and Southwest Asia to inspect the ships, have an office at the Rotterdam site, too, as does the Air Force, whose Water Port Liaison Office looks out for Air Force interests, Thompson explained.

“Everything we do is with the commercial world,” Thompson said. “The port authorities want one point of contact to deal with, regardless that the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force are all there. We’re that POC.”

Some 300 people are part of the 598th and its subordinate Army units. Among them are 85 soldiers, sailors and airmen, and more than 50 Department of the Army civilians. The rest are local nationals.

Recently, key personnel from the 598th Trans. Grp. and related elements met to plan for the movement of supplies as part of a command post exercise called Unified Charger.

“The CPX is but one of many operations conducted by the Military Traffic Management Command unit in the Netherlands to hone skills that are needed every time something happens

A sprawling staging area in the Croatia port city of Rijeka gives a good idea of the huge amounts of equipment shipped to the Balkans by the Rotterdam-based 598th Transportation Group.



(Top) A Humvee and its trailer move aboard the Ukrainian cargo vessel Balakleya during the movement of Army equipment for the NATO exercise Adventure Express 2000 in Norway. **(Above)** Soldiers of the 598th Trans. Grp. check the shipping documents of Balkans-bound vehicles.

in Europe, Africa or Southwest Asia,” de Jong said.

“For training purposes, we crammed a year’s worth of problems into two weeks,” said Tom Womble, a civilian action officer for Unified Charger. “On paper, more than 600 pieces of equipment were loaded aboard a ship in Bremerhaven and the 839th Trans. Bn. in Livorno assisted in other vessel operations.”

Each port was given a particular problem during the exercise. Action officers had to deal with things like missing containers, refugee pickups in transit, port closures, smuggling operations, VIP procedures and port surveys, among other things.

“We do this so we can relive some hard days we had in 1999,” Thompson said. “It allows us to work with each other and our Reserve augmentees, so we don’t reinvent the wheel in dealing with some of these problems. We learn from each other and from past, real-life events.” □

